Abstract

The purpose of this research is to propose, implement and validate a training program focused on the development of career management competencies for beginning teachers. The starting point is an operational model that integrates seven categories of competencies: cognitive and meta-cognitive, methodological, communicational and relational, evaluative, psycho-social, career management, and ICT competences. In order to conduct the research, we have established the following objectives: to evaluate the level of development of career management competences of beginning teachers; to establish the design and course for a program of formative activities that will lead to the improvement of career management competences; and to perform a final evaluation of these career management competences. The main research method uses a formative psychological experimental design with repeated measurements (test – post test), analysis of the products of teachers’ activities (projects, competences portfolios), psycho-pedagogical observation, and statistical analysis.

Statistical data obtained during the research show significant differences with respect to the results obtained by the beginning teachers at the evaluation applied at the end of the formative stage, compared to those obtained during the initial evaluation. The results of this research highlight the progress registered in developing certain capacities and skills for career management by participants in the training program. The data and ideas drawn from the research will be used to improve initial and continuous training programs for teachers.

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Keywords: career management competences; beginning teachers; career planning; training program; operational model.

1. Introduction

The topic of initial and continuous training of teaching staff has been much debated during past decades. This interest has increased along with the reforms and efforts made to institute innovative education systems and to professionalize training systems for teachers. A major contribution has been provided by the new training paradigms, based on experimental studies and research which use recently developed models of cognitivism and constructivism, and reflective practitioner theories. Metacognition, reflective capacity and critical thinking are essential attributes of a teacher (Anderson & Block, 1988; Altet, 1994; Bourdoncle, 1991; Carbonneau, 1996; Doherty, Hilberg, Epaloose, & Tharp, 2002; Boisvert, 1997; Gombert, 1990; Méard & Bruno, 2009; Schön, 1994).

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In this context, the beginning of a teaching career represents a complex problem which has been addressed in studies, projects and research throughout the past decade. In many fields (psychology, medicine, law, etc.), the start of a career is marked by a period of internship, whereby the recently qualified professional works under the guidance of an experienced mentor, specially employed to provide support to enhance learning in concrete practical situations and to facilitate socio-professional integration. Unfortunately, in many educational systems, this internship period is missing; nonetheless, it is still wished for by beginning teachers.

Research on ways to integrate beginning teachers using, for example, workshops, debates, and interviews underlines their challenges at this stage of change in social environment, regarding adapting to new requirements, rules and responsibilities (it should be noted that it is only in theory that many of these challenges are met exclusively at entry levels); all are of major relevance to the individual’s future teaching career. Many beginners encounter multiple difficulties at work, including problems in socialization, activity planning, classroom management, communication and networking with students; they may experience feelings of isolation and incompatibility with status requirements; hence, they may develop low self-esteem and feelings of frustration. These difficulties may lead to a high percentage of individuals giving up their teaching careers (Allen, 2009; Killeavy & Maloney, 2010; Malderez & Bodoczky, 2009; Urzua, 1999, Johnson, 2001; Dumitriu & Dumitriu, 2009). It was found that self-esteem has a significant effect on performance in all types of activities. Thus, individuals with high self-esteem and great confidence in their potential easily develop good communication skills and relationships, are assertive, open, become involved in activities, manage to reach their goals and achieve success. All of these reinforce a positive self-image. By contrast, low self-esteem generates discomfort, isolation, fear of failure and lack of motivation at work.

In the early stages of a teaching career, causes of obstacles and failures comprise deficiencies in initial training; a reduced share of teaching practice within the initial training program; failure to develop professional habits of transferring theoretical knowledge into educational practice; lack of mentoring during internship and career start periods; lack of abilities for career planning; overloading of beginners with complex tasks; indifference of families and the local community towards the school and children’s school situation; low unmotivating salaries, etc.

The topic of teaching career management refers to the career planning process (promotion steps within the school organisation, according to its needs), acknowledging achievements, assessing potential and ensuring managerial succession in order to achieve the school’s objectives. As a process of design and implementation of goals, strategies and plans, career management helps the organization to fulfill human resource needs and assists individuals in their career goal achievements. A career is perceived as an evolving succession of professional activities and positions of a person together with his or her knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences developed over time (Șchiopu, 1997; Dumitriu, Dumitriu, Măță & Timofti, 2011).

Career planning is the process of identifying career needs, aspirations and opportunities, and the implementation of human resource development programs to support it. Individual career planning is integrated in "organizational career" planning (Iucu, 2007, 31); career development is a long-term process which includes programs and activities necessary to meet individual career plans. Teaching career development involves interaction between the skills, abilities, competences, interests and development needs of an individual with the opportunities provided by the school as an organization. The teaching career is influenced by a variety of factors, such as personal needs and aspirations, social, economic and demographic context, etc. Building a teaching career involves self-awareness, personal involvement, loyalty, and accurate assessment of a teacher’s potential and performance; it also requires that the schools provide professional strategies that will best capitalise upon the teacher’s initial professional and pedagogical training. Beginning teachers will develop their own strategies progressively to systematically evaluate their options and effectively manage their mental potential and temporal resources.

This research has been conducted within the "MODECOMP" research project, which has the following main objectives:

To design and develop research studies to identify the problems in the teaching process faced by beginning teachers;
To elaborate the operational model for the development of beginning teachers’ professional competences;
To organize and develop the psycho-pedagogical experiment;
To compare the results obtained by beginning teachers in the initial and final evaluations with a view to establishing the influence of the progress factor.

The MODECOMP operational model integrates seven categories of competences of beginning teachers. The results obtained during the research on the development of the first six types of competences have been communicated in various papers (Dumitriu, Timofti & Dumitriu, 2011; Dumitriu & Dumitriu, 2011; Măţă, 2011; Nechita & Timofti, 2011).

This paper presents the design of the experimental research regarding the development of competences necessary for the teaching career management of beginning teachers.

2. Research design

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the efficiency of the training programme centred on the operational model of career management competences development for beginning teachers.

2.1. The research hypotheses

General hypothesis. Using the operational model structured on the correlation of contents with certain types of activities and educational intervention strategies contributes to the development of teaching career management competences of beginning teachers.

Specific hypothesis 1. There are significant differences between the participants’ initial and final evaluations concerning their capacity to build and maintain a positive self-image by relating to professional status.

Specific hypothesis 2. There are significant differences between the initial and final evaluations regarding manifesting a receptive attitude toward professional development.

Specific hypothesis 3. There are significant differences between the initial and final evaluations regarding the capacity to relate individual training and activity to teachers’ professional standards.

Specific hypothesis 4. There are significant differences between the initial and final evaluations concerning the manifestation of positive motivation for involvement in professional development activities.

Specific hypothesis 5. There are significant differences between the initial and final evaluations regarding metacognitive capacity and the capacity for self-reflection proven in the teaching activity.

2.2. Description of concepts and variables

The main concept of professional competence of beginning teachers has been elaborated into seven main categories: cognitive and metacognitive; methodological; communication and relationship; student assessment; psychosocial; ICT competences; and career management. The career management competence is structured into five specific competences: that of building and maintaining a positive self-image by relating to professional status; manifesting a proactive receptive attitude toward professional development; the capacity of relating individual training and activity to teaching profession standards; manifestating positive motivation for involvement in personal and professional development activities; metacognitive capacity and the capacity for self-reflection proven in the teaching activities. Each specific competence is represented by three level descriptors which indicate the level of development for the teaching career management competence. The dependent variable is represented by the level of development of career management competence of beginning teachers, while the independent variable is represented by the temporal moment, with its two levels: before the intervention (the pre-test) and after the intervention (the post-test).
2.3. Participants

The sample comprises 103 primary and secondary Romanian school beginning teachers consisting of 93 women (90.3%) and 10 men (9.7%). Depending on the specialization variable, the subjects are distributed thus: 30 (29.1%) philology/letters; 24 (23.3%) primary and pre-school pedagogy; 8 (7.8%) sciences; 18 (17.5%) technical/engineering; 18 (17.5%) socio-humanist; 5 (4.8%) sports, movement and health sciences. Thirty one (30.1%) develop their activities in urban environments and 72 (69.9%) in rural areas.

2.4. Methodology

In order to identify the impact of the operational model on the development of career management competences of beginning teachers, a psycho-pedagogical experimental approach was used. The study was conducted between July 2010 and August 2011.

The evaluation instrument comprises 105 items, 15 for each of the seven categories of professional competences and 3 for each of the dimensions (specific competences) at the level of competences for didactic career management. Each evaluative item in the instrument is based on a rating scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating a very low level of competence and 5 indicating a very high level of competence, 3 being the satisfactory level. The minimum score for each item is 1, and the maximum score for each item is 5. Correspondingly, the minimum score for each dimension is 3, and the maximum score for each dimension is 15.

Procedure. Beginning teachers were required to fill out the evaluation instrument at the beginning and at the end of the experimental program.

3. Results and discussions

The general hypothesis is supported as the results obtained at the end of the training program were higher than those obtained before the program began. The decriptive analysis of the data collected at initial and final evaluation (Table 1) indicates significant differences in the level of development of career management competences as a result of participation in the training program.

All five specific hypotheses are supported. There are significant differences between the results before and after the implementation of the training program with regard to:

- The participants' ability to build and maintain a positive self-image by reference to professional status \[ t (102) = 4.23, p<0.05 \];
- Manifestation of a receptive attitude towards their professional development \[ t (102) = 7.33, p<0.05 \];
- Relating their activity and training to professional standards \[ t (102) = 9.34, p<0.05 \].

As far as the positive motivation to participate in professional development is concerned \[ t (102) = 14.21, p<0.05 \], there are significant differences between the results before and after the training program concerning the capacity metacognitive and self-reflection capacity proven during the teaching activity \[ t (102) = 10.60, p<0.05 \].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M_initial</th>
<th>SD_initial</th>
<th>M_final</th>
<th>SD_final</th>
<th>t (102)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>LL</th>
<th>UL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building positive self-image (initial)</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>-4.23</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifesting receptive attitude toward professional development (initial)</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>-7.33</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating individual training and activity to professional standards (initial)</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>-9.34</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The results obtained by the participants in the training program highlight their progress in developing the structural components of career management competence and furthermore imply that the intervention program is effective. During the training sessions, there were organized workshops to help beginners to develop a realistic career plan, focusing on identifying potential difficulties and assessing the results at the beginner stage. Specific techniques were applied intended to raise awareness of professional development needs, as well as to develop self-awareness and positive self-image. For the purposes of practicing and developing metacognition, reflective capacities and critical thinking skills, problematic situations were devised referring to the skill-centered approach, the logical approach, mediating strategies for developing reasoning, conceptualization and problem-solving processes, generative strategies for developing creativity and inventing new solutions, together with strategies for developing effective cooperation and networking skills within the group.

### 4. Conclusions

Difficulties faced by beginning teachers in their early teaching career were identified from the literature and educational practice. In order to address these difficulties, we have designed and implemented a program for beginning teachers’ development of competences based on an operational model. Research results have validated the effectiveness of this model in developing teaching career management competences. In order to develop the specific competences along with each of their structural elements, elements of constructivist theory were used when experimenting with various procedural tools and interactive strategies, thus enabling the active, direct, experiential and personalized involvement of participants. Group activities carried out within the training sessions have been continued and completed with individual, self-training activities. All participants have been trained to use guidelines to enable them to develop the structural elements of the competences, integrating these “cognitive constructs” within their portfolio evaluations. With a view to developing teaching skills and building the areas of specific competences required by the nature and complexity of teachers’ professional roles, we have laid emphasis on personal and professional development strategies, and on diversifying training devices. We have focused on verbalization; interview techniques; videoformation; valuing personal cognitive experience; reciprocal observation; metacognition with students; reflective journals; simulations; role play; and portfolios.

Among the difficulties we have encountered, the most relevant have concerned the low receptivity of some participants to the need for professional development, their lack of effective techniques for learning and self-development, as well as lack of sincerity and facade tendency in filling out questionnaires and interview guides. The data and ideas drawn from the research will be used to improve initial and continuous training programs for teachers.
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References


